

City of Cambridge Recycling Advisory Committee

October 6, 2005 Meeting – Minutes Taken by Cornelia Herzfeld

Members Attending: Rob Gogan, Harvard University; Cornelia Herzfeld, Cambridge resident; Adam Mitchell, Save That Stuff; Paul Schlaver, Cambridge Consumers Council

Guests Attending: Justin Adams, MIT; Kevin Douglas, Russell Disposal; Kelly Dunn, Recycling Program Manager; Randi Mail, Recycling Director; Doane Perry, Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Association; Shauna Schiller, FCR/Casella; John Nardone, DPW Assistant Commissioner for Operations

FCR Update

Shauna reported that prices on everything except cardboard, which had dropped \$5 were holding steady. The closing of the Natick paperboard mill and another area mill were driving the paper market. Shauna said that she had read in the newspaper that mill closed because the neighbors had complained about odors. Rob commented that there was really no odor outside of the “slug” room, but that the hot and dry summer had generally caused lots of complaints about smells.

Shauna clarified that FCR take all plastics with a number EXCEPT Styrofoam and plastic bags. Randi asked if FCR used Waste News for the pricing of commingled and Shauna said that FCR used internal sales figures. Randi explained that there was a new clause in Cambridge’s contract with FCR so that if the average price for the previous three months is more than \$65/T, Cambridge would be paid 50% of the difference.

Update on the “Recycle 40% by 2005” goal

Randi gave a report, in response to a request at the last meeting for an update on the city’s progress toward the 40% goal. She explained that in February 2003, this goal had been committed to by the city, Harvard, MIT, the Cambridge Health Alliance and the Chamber of Commerce, Broadway Bicycle, Lesley University, Pfizer Inc., Irving House at Harvard, HMFH Architects, Whole Foods and ZipCar.

One of the first steps taken was to hire DSM Environmental, a consulting firm to evaluate how much recycling was in the trash by managing 4 separate waste sorts and the effectiveness of the Recycling Drop-Off Center. View the reports at www.cambridgema.gov/TheWorks/departments/recycle/studies.html. There were two major findings from the study: up to 1500 more tons of paper could still be recycled each year and 48% of all household waste could be recycled in the existing curbside recycling program. The numbers showed that even neighborhoods with high participation (typically high income, owners) could do much more.

DSM made a few important recommendations including:

- 1) Increase the container capacity given to homeowners
In response, DPW applied for and received a grant from the DEP which is paying for distribution of 250 toters just for paper to homeowners in mostly single

through three family homes. Historically, DPW has given toters to buildings with 13+ units. In addition, DPW will soon pilot distribution of a divided bag for holding paper and commingled in separate sections to owners and renters in large apartment buildings that often don’t have personal recycling bins. See www.multibag.com/recycle/pg/s.html. It can hang on a doorknob and not take up any floor space. When the bag fills up, the resident empties the recyclables into the building’s toters. With support and commitment from property managers, Kelly will distribute these with flyers to owners and tenants in 5 different buildings, including a Cambridge Housing Authority property.

- 2) Focus on getting more paper out of the trash (paperboard, cardboard, magazines, mixed paper, etc)

In addition to the efforts described above, DPW:

- Distributed “trash” buddies in several city buildings
- Installed a cardboard compactor at the Drop-Off Center
- Email surveyed 400 residents that requested bins. interested. About 30% responded and the findings showed a need to elaborate on accepted types of paper, particularly paperboard and glossy paper as many myths still linger from the early days of recycling. Also, it is important to educate residents that all paper can go together; glossy paper is OK; and that staples, paper clips, spirals, plastic windows and even the plastic spout on milk/juice cartons do not need to be removed.
- Developed a 2-page advertisement on recycling in the *Cambridge Life* magazine
- Taped two public service announcements shown on the cable channel
- Worked with MIT volunteers to call a couple hundred residents that recently requested a blue bin to give paper recycling tips
- Expanded information on recycling in the new Recycling & Trash Guidelines mailed to all households
- Advertised a paper recycling presentation in the Cambridge Center for Adult Education fall catalogue
- Is planning a paper recycling contest in the public schools
- And much more!

- 3) Focus on low and high-income residents since both still throw out ~465 pounds of paper per household/year.

DPW had the Recycling & Trash Guidelines translated into 9 languages and is working on a Master Outreach Plan designed to respond to the diverse and transient population demographics. A new "Recycling Neighbors" program will recruit residents to volunteer at a number of levels of time and commitment. Ultimately, there would be one recycling neighbor on every street! In particular, Randi hopes to recruit at least 1 parent from each public school; 1 participant from each church, synagogue or mosque; 1 user of each library and 1 owner from each condominium.

- 4) Focus on getting existing recyclers to recycle more rather than getting non-recyclers to start.

This recommendation is rooted in the findings from the *East Cambridge Community Based Social Marketing Recycling Outreach Partnership Project*, completed in August 2004. This project found that door to door outreach and phone calls were much more effective in getting residents to recycle than just sending brochures in the mail with no contact. In addition, recycling staff is working to incorporate community-based social marketing techniques such as prompts, commitment, norms, etc. into outreach and education efforts and exploring opportunities to call more residents with volunteer help and have recycling drivers leave notes in resident's bins immediately after collection, etc.

- 5) Focus on getting more bulky waste recycled generated during the busy Spring and Fall moving time.

DPW has partnered with Harvard and Mabardy, a transfer station in North Cambridge to collect bulky waste. Last year, 700 pounds of reusable items were diverted from a pilot project with Harvard. For 6 weeks this year in May/June and August/September, Mabardy sent a truck 3-5 days/week to collect mattresses and furniture intentionally left behind by the rubbish crews and called into Recycling staff. Furniture and mattresses were sent to Conigliaro for recycling and Mabardy paid the recycling costs. Mabardy recycled wood and metal collected. About 5 tons was recycled through this pilot project. Now, Mabardy and DPW are talking about the possibility of a long-term partnership to accept and recycle these wastes, which could divert about 40-70 tons/year.

Recycling and Trash Numbers

Randi shared the figures for recycling and waste, presented in a new form: on a month-to-month basis, with comparison with the previous three years. She pointed out that the numbers, while indicative of trends, were not yet completely comparable, since she was

making sure that certain trash numbers (estimates from privately served apartment buildings and the Cambridge Housing Authority) were not inflated or counted twice. Also, she spoke about DPW intention to publicize these figures more through the newspaper and other outlets and any Committee members were encouraged to help with this if interested.

Paul wondered whether new technology (e.g., the internet) were changing the substances in recycling/trash. Adam responded that while newspapers were down, packaging continued to increase.

Randi briefly discussed a pending grant proposal submitted to DEP to work with Save That Stuff to offer compost collection to businesses and the four schools participating in City Sprouts (www.citysprouts.org). Letters of support for the proposals were submitted by Adam Michell, Save That Stuff; Jim Maloney; Cambridge Public Schools; Jane Smillie, CitySprouts; and Kelly Clark, Cambridge Chamber of Commerce. Randi can email the proposal to those interested.

Rob suggested that the message be simple and consistent, and that we should be thinking in terms of per capita trash rather than simply the rate of recycling.

Adam suggested that the city start thinking beyond the 40% goal and toward PAYT, particularly if, given the problem of rat control, the city might be considering providing free trash containers. He expressed a concern that, in the context of dropping recycling numbers, recycling might be badly affected by containerization, and should be part of the discussion of the problem.

Shauna inquired about the enforcement of the regulation. Randi said that property management companies are fined if they didn't respond to outreach and warnings, and that businesses have been fined as well. There really has never been any enforcement of recycling with individual homeowners to date.

John Nardone said that the changes to the Ordinance requiring residents to set out trash in 32-gallon barrels with lids would create a new Compliance Officer position that would be housed within the Recycling Division and play a role in recycling enforcement and education. He also said that the City did not view PAYT favorably at this time.

Adam suggested that city ask that Trader Joe's and the Harvest Coop print a recycling message on the side of their paper bags.

Rob expressed gratitude from the committee for Randi's leadership in the 40% (and beyond) goal.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30am